

Finally, Agreement On Treaty — and Long Debate Opens

The Administration jumped the gun last week on the long-awaited Soviet-American treaty to limit long-range nuclear missiles and bombers, announcing "basic agreement" before final details were complete. President Carter thereby got a running start in an uphill struggle for public understanding and support and Senate ratification. The vote is expected early next year, extending the lengthy debate over the complicated set of ceilings on land-based and submarine launchers, multiple warheads, low-flying cruise missiles and new missile systems into the 1980 Presidential campaign.

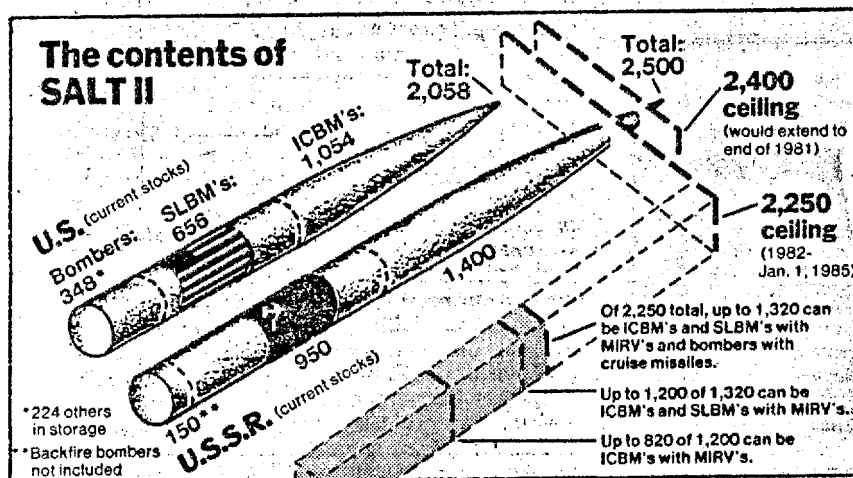
After an unexplained one-day delay,

might become of the treaty and of the East-West military balance if Mr. Brezhnev, détente's Soviet godfather, were to be sidelined before the signing.

Hailing the treaty, Mr. Carter said its ratification would be "the most important single achievement that could possibly take place for our nation during my lifetime." If the treaty were not approved, added Senator Frank Church, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, "détente would lie like broken pottery on the floor."

Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance said the treaty's main accomplishments were equal ceilings and reductions on missiles and bombers — initially to total 2,400 but dropping to 2,250 by 1981 — and the first limitations on the qualitative race in nuclear arms. It also bans interference with treaty verification through satellite and other observation methods.

Skeptics worry that with the loss of



Tass also reported the news, saying that the signatory meeting between Presidents Carter and Leonid I. Brezhnev was "tentatively" set for June 15 to 18 in Vienna. The Soviet hedging, absent from the American announcement, seemed to imply that either the talks, or Mr. Brezhnev's health, might collapse before then. Meeting recently with French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the Soviet leader's attention span was short, and he had to be rescued when he meandered toward the wrong exit after a Kremlin reception. No one could safely say what

Iranian listening posts, the treaty will be unverifiable. Others say the Russians already have a strategic advantage and will be able to deepen it under SALT II. Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., the retiring Allied commander in Europe and not-so-retiring potential candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination, said last week that he has "serious questions" about the accord.

As happened with SALT I, the Administration is expected to try to "buy" the necessary two-thirds support from fence-sitters by agreeing to develop new weapons systems such as the mobile MX missile and to beef up United States forces in Europe. So no end to the arms race is in sight.